



A Kiowa helicopter silhouetted against the California sunset searches a roadway for insurgent activity as 2-35th Infantry convoys during combat training exercises at NTC.

Cacti launch offensive

Story and Photo by
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FORT IRWIN, Calif. – In the dark desert hills, Soldiers mobilized a few “clicks” from their objective. Noise and light discipline were the standing orders. Adjusting their night vision devices, they crept through the darkness toward the objective.

Let the war game begin...
Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment (“Cacti”), launched the first major attack against anti-Iraqi forces in the small town of Jabal, Medina, during the early morning hours May 1. Jabal is a small town in Medina, the fictitious setting for combat training exercises at the National Training Center.

“The scenario was that insurgents had taken back Jabal, a town that the U.S. had previously turned over to the Iraqi police,” explained 1st Lt. Joshua Deese, executive officer, C Company, 2-35. “We were helping the Iraqi Army to take it back.”

After planning and preparation, companies from 2-35 launched the objective at night in terrain remarkably similar to Afghanistan and Iraq. The opposition force was about 80 members strong and consisted of Soldiers acting as insurgents. The morning’s objective, Jabal, contained at least 30 structures.

“The fighting lasted about seven hours,” said 2nd Lt. Michael Centola, the fire support officer. “We really used everyone in the bat-

talion for battle. It was a complete combined-arms operation.”

Various combat vehicles, aircraft, infantry weapons systems and command and control elements vied for position during the comprehensive assault.

“We all need to know our jobs when we deploy. This is the place to fine tune everything,” Deese said. “The mission doesn’t end when the shooting stops. We still need to coordinate and move the injured, get food and water to the Soldiers ... There are a lot of moving parts.”

Capt. Rob Wolfe, the company commander, underscored the overall significance of the mission.

“Winning or losing at NTC is not very important at all. Most units that come here lose,” he said. Wolfe also stressed the importance of exposing Soldiers to the types of combat conditions they may experience on deployment.

“We are a light infantry force and we’ll be mounted or motorized in Iraq. So it is invaluable for us to be around the vehicles, to conduct convoy operations, and to learn how to react to various types of enemy contact,” he said.

“Seventy-five percent of our Soldiers are new to the unit,” said Staff Sgt. Charles Wood, the company weapons squad leader. “So these missions are important. It gets the guys working as a team, and gives the team a feel for what it will be like to live and fight together in Iraq.”

540th Quartermaster ‘LADS’ cleans up at NTC

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FORT IRWIN, Calif. – They’re big green “mobile beasts.” They’re the 25th Infantry Division’s “laundromats on wheels” and are being used for the first time by 3rd Brigade in a real world training environment.

The new machine is called “LADS” – the Laundry Advanced System. LADS is the brigade’s washing, rinsing and drying equipment of choice being operated by Schofield Barracks’ own 540th Quartermaster Company. The system is being used in NTC’s “dustbowl” – the initial mobilization location – and down in “the box” – the primary training spot.

Two of the five LADS are being used in the dustbowl and the remaining units will be transported to the box. The 540th has had the equipment for just four months, and NTC will be the first real test.

“LADS is a completely computerized laundry system,” said Sgt. Chris Wilson, 540th Quartermaster Company, 25th Inf. Div.

“Once the machine cuts on, it pulls water from an adjoining bladder. The water fills [certain] tanks on LADS, each tank being designated for a particular function. As water is used, it is recycled,” said Wilson. “Basically, we hook up the hoses, add fuel and soap, put in the clothes and you’re good to go. It’s a complete machine.”

A single machine can wash, rinse and dry clothing in 65 to 75 minutes without the operator having to remove the clothing except to retrieve the finished product. This “labor-saver” is a marked improvement over the older system.

“With the old system, we had to actually put a safety pin in each separate article of clothing. We also had to pull the wet clothes out of the washer, put them in the dryer, and remove them when they were finished,” said Sgt. Ramon Umpierre, 540th.

“With LADS you don’t pin anything. All the clothing is enclosed in a single



Spc. James Domingo, 540th Quartermaster Company, tosses a bag of clothing into the LADS, Laundry Advanced System, which has revolutionized cleaning clothes in the field.



Spc. Marianela Perlaza, also of 540th Quartermaster Company, reaches to remove clothing from the LADS. The system makes cleaning clothes far more efficient and less labor intensive. Clothing no longer needs to be individually pinned, but instead, it can be placed in bulk into garment bags before being placed in the LADS.

mesh garment bag. We just inventory the clothing, put them in a single mesh bag and place the bag in the machine,” said Umpierre. “One machine does everything – wash, rinse and dry.”

“This complete laundry service on wheels also saves the Soldiers time and money,” emphasized Staff Sgt. Demond Akridge, noncommissioned officer-in-charge, 540th. According to Akridge, the Soldiers simply drop off their laundry in a marked bag and can rely on the machine and its operators to have their clothing ready for pick-up within 24 to 72 hours, depending

upon mission conditions.

The 540th is utilizing approximately 80 Soldiers to accomplish their mission at NTC. In addition to laundry service, however, the 540th is also tasked to provide hot showers in the field and uniform renovation services.

“A hot shower in the field goes a long way; clean clothes go a long way; the right patch on your uniform goes a long way to improving the morale of the Soldier on the battlefield,” said Akridge. “We’re here to prove to the Soldier that we can provide all these services in the field.”